

Your Robotic Self

by Robert Bedrosian*

For R. Giscard and R. Daneel Olivaw, best friends and best companions

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In this essay, we consider moving. Anyone who has physically moved from one location to another knows the experience: deciding what to take along; packing; the final checking; and then (with differing emotions) departing to the new destination. The move we will consider here is the move from our human (organic) selves to robotic (non-organic) selves.

Let us say that in the same room with you is a robot that will be your new home. This "machine" need not look like the Tin Man in the drama "Wizard of Oz." It could be indistinguishable from a human. It might look like you at age 18, or at any age you choose. If your organic self has physical or mental defects—real or perceived—your robotic self would lack them. In any case, physically, it is stronger than you could have been at 18, and certainly faster. Its intellect, with access to immense global resources, and its analytical abilities would be breathtaking, and its memory would never falter. It would have better vision, hearing, sense of smell, and other senses and abilities, too. It might be able to hover over the ground, bore into the earth, travel through water like a submarine, and fly into space.

Let us return to our organic selves, since we are not through packing. There is something else which needs to be sorted out and packed, the contents of one important box.

Here is the problem: do we want to take our personalities along? Do we want that robotic version of us to have all the negatives we carry along as organic beings? Shall it have all our hatred, jealousy, meanness, and shallowness—the Seven Deadly Sins with our own personal embellishments? How about all the memories we have, or had? Are there any that we don't want in our new selves? Anything we want to "delete?" Thus, one thing in that box is our personality. What is it, anyhow, beyond all our likes, dislikes, and all our other "particularisms?" These are important parts of what differentiate us from one another, what make us what we are as individuals. There is, unquestionably, an animal violence built into each of us. Should we take that along?

Isaac Asimov, the great science fiction writer, has a delightful scene in several of his stories. Two famous robots, Giscard and Daneel Olivaw—though they can communicate electronically—exchange "significant glances" at an important moment, and their positronic eyes briefly glow with an orange-red light. In terms of this essay, we have reached such a moment. We are about to discuss some other packing issues. Though "indelicate" these matters must be addressed, since they constitute a major part of our existence as organic life forms. Nothing short of scrupulous direct observation will work here.

Let us look again at our future self, that stunningly gorgeous robot in the same room with us. Let's let our envious eyes wander over it lovingly. Our robotic self will not have to drink or eat. It will not need to urinate or defecate. It will not need to breathe or sleep, and could communicate electronically. It could have truly shocking sex, but it would not need to. With each of these human activities, we see more and more of what we (as organic creatures) are occupied with: our births, our lives, our deaths—always breathing, eating, drinking, expelling, sleeping, dreaming.

The entity that we are imagining is not a machine controlled by an organic human. It is a non-organic human. For this, of course, we are faced with the age-old question of what we are and what we are part of. These issues are difficult and elusive and have occupied the minds of writers from antiquity to the present. One method of trying to see what we are, is to consider what we would pack into a version of ourselves which would be, hopefully, not just the same thing fashioned from more durable materials.

Notes

Wikipedia entries:

The idea of mechanical humans is quite ancient. They appear in Greek myths as [Automata](#).

[Robots](#)

[Isaac Asimov](#)
[Foundation Series](#)

[Thought Experiments](#)

[Humanities Series](#), at Internet Archive.

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